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Rutgers Leads USDA Grant to Improve Disease Resistance in Sweet Basil



James Simon, Distinguished Professor of Plant Biology, and **Andrew Wyenandt**, vegetable crops extension specialist in plant pathology at Rutgers NJAES, lead a team of scientists from the University of Massachusetts, University of Florida, and Bar Ilan University in Israel on a [\\$3.4 million USDA-NIFA grant](#) to develop new genetic tools to better combat continued vulnerability of sweet basil. The five-year project, “Investigating the genetic basis of downy mildew and bacterial leaf spot resistance in basil (*Ocimum*) using advanced genomic techniques,” will focus on addressing the breakdown of resistance in current Basil Downy Mildew (BDM)-resistant sweet basil lines by creating new BDM and Bacterial Leaf Spot (BLS) resistant germplasm. In 2007, Basil Downy Mildew (BDM) was discovered for the first time in the U.S. and quickly became the most economically dangerous pathogen devastating sweet basil crops across the country. An increasing number of growers and stakeholders have also identified Bacterial Leaf Spot (BLS) as a powerful new disease targeting sweet basil.

FIC Announces Advisory Board of Globally Recognized Food Industry Leaders

Rutgers Food Innovation Center (FIC) created its [first formal Advisory Board](#) comprising globally-recognized leaders in the food industry. The board will help identify new opportunities to better serve the food industry and provide strategic guidance to FIC’s senior leadership team, which includes **Nolan Lewin**, executive director. Advisory Board members are Lou Cooperhouse, president and CEO of BlueNalu, who will serve as chair (*Cooperhouse is co-founder and former FIC executive director*); Andrew Gellert, president of Gellert Global Group; Takis Solomos, partner of Elikonos Capital Partners; Brian Choi, managing partner and CEO of The Food Institute; and Peggy Brennan-Tonetta, senior associate director, NJAES (*Brennan is co-founder and administrator-in-charge of FIC*). The center is internationally recognized for supporting early-stage food entrepreneurs and established food companies in the development of their food and beverage products, from concept to commercialization.

Joel Flagler Awarded Distinguished Service Award by NJNLA

Joel Flagler, department head and agricultural agent, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Bergen County, was honored by the New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association with its 2022 Distinguished Service Award. This award recognizes the contributions of an individual who has given their time and resources to support and grow the horticulture industry in New Jersey. A registered horticultural therapist, Flagler initiated the [Horticultural Therapy Program](#) at Rutgers, one of a few accredited, university-based programs in the U.S., and the first curricula in [Horticultural Therapy](#), described as use of plants and plant-based activity for the purpose of human healing and rehabilitation.

Of Interest

The national On-Farm Readiness Review farm assessment training, funded by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), was developed to educate regulators and technical assistance providers on how to confidentially assess a farm's readiness for a FSMA Produce Safety Rule inspection. The development team is led by the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture and is comprised of **Wesley Kline**, agricultural agent, RCE of Cumberland County, and **Meredith Melendez**, agricultural agent, RCE of Mercer County, along with produce safety experts from the University of Florida, Cornell University, North Carolina State University, and Michigan State University. The team transitioned the training from in-person to online so that regulators and technical assistance providers could better understand how the FSMA PSR impacts individual farms and to better understand the rule itself. Since early 2021, the team has held eight trainings online with two upcoming trainings scheduled for winter 2023. To date, 105 state regulatory program staff, 34 Extension educators, five FDA staff, and one member of a trade association have been trained online, representing a total of 145 attendees from 36 states.

Mazen Shehat has been named the Senior Associate Dean of Finance and Administration for SEBS and NJAES. This position is responsible for the organization, direction, and management of all administrative and business offices that support the school and experiment station, including finance administration, budget and planning, human resources, facilities operations and planning, and information technology for instructional and research support. Prior to this appointment, Mazen served from 2020 as Senior Director of Finance and Administration at the Rutgers School of Engineering, providing budgetary, accounting, and fiscal support. He holds a bachelor's degree in Accounting from Montclair State and a master's degree in public administration from the Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration.

Grants

Kit Yam, professor in the Department of Food Science, is co-investigator of a new award for the project, "Development of Controlled Release In-transit Ripening Technology for Delivering Ready-to-Eat Fruits to Distribution Centers for Domestic and International Markets," funded by USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Nazir Mir, associate member of the Food Science graduate faculty, is principal investigator on the project, which runs from September 1, 2022 to August 31, 2024.

Events

The six-week online training course, "**Annie Goes Online: Risk Management On Your Kitchen Table**," will be held virtually on Zoom, one evening per week, starting Jan. 11. The course educates and trains new and aspiring farm women on risk management strategies. [Registration is open](#) through Dec. 31.

FSMA Produce Safety Rule Training is scheduled for Jan. 11 at Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Mercer County, 1440 Parkside Avenue, Ewing, NJ, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. [Deadline to register is Jan. 4](#). For more information, contact Brandi Williams at 856-451-2800, ext. 1, or via email at brandiwi@co.cumberland.nj.us.

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